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BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Statistical Brief

Single Parents and Their Children

The number of single parents has increased dramatically.

Between 1970 and 1988, the number of single parents with children under 18 in the home more than doubled from 3.8 million to 9.4 million. This dramatic rise is reflected in the increase of single-parent families as a proportion of all family groups with children: from 13 percent in 1970 to 27 percent in 1988. This increase is one of the most important recent changes in family composition, with major implications for poverty and social welfare programs.

The total number of single parents is made up of those who maintained their own households with their children under 18 (families) and those who lived in someone else's household with their children (subfamilies); about 1 of 5 single parents lived in someone else's household.

Most single parents are White.

Although almost two-thirds (65 percent) of all single parents are White, one-parent situations are more prevalent among Blacks. In 1988, about 59 percent of all Black family groups with children under age 18 present in the home were maintained by single parents versus 22 percent for Whites. Among Hispanics (who may be of any race), 34 percent of family groups with children had only one parent present in 1988.

The vast majority of single parents are mothers.

There were an estimated 8.1 million mother-child family groups in 1988. These mothers accounted for about 87 percent of all single parents, only slightly below their 90 percent share in both 1980 and 1970.

People become single parents by several different paths.

Virtually all one-parent situations are created in 1 of 4 ways: 1) divorce, 2) out-of-wedlock births (usually but not always, these births involve women who have never been married), 3) separation, or 4) widowhood. Mothers who either had never been married or were divorced accounted for 62 percent of all single parents in 1988.

Single parents are younger than those in two-parent families.

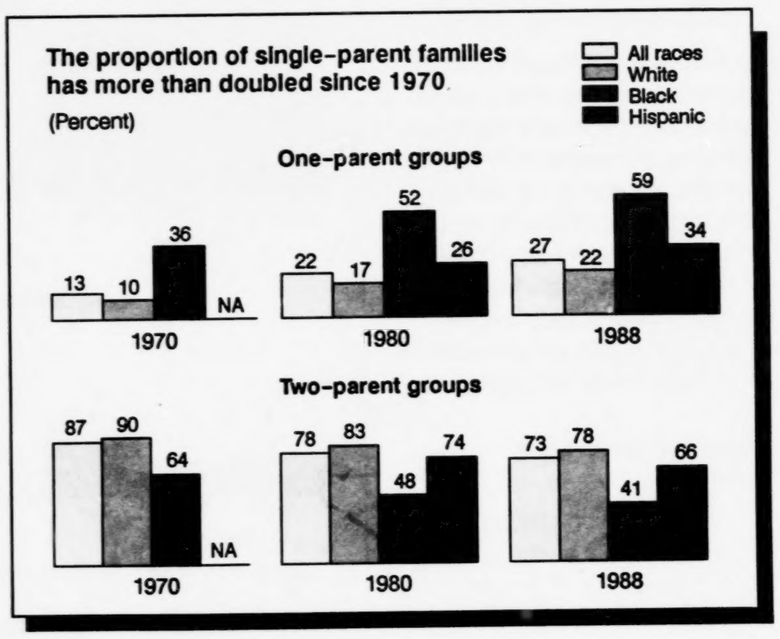
The median age of single parents in 1988 was 33.2 years, compared with a median of 37.4 years for parents maintaining two-parent family groups. Single mothers are likely to be younger than single fathers: 32.7 years versus 36.5 years, respectively.

One-fourth of all children lived with one parent.

Of the 63 million children under 18 in 1988, about 15 million (24

The proportion of single-parent families has more than doubled since 1970

(Percent)



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percent) were living with one parent only--a tremendous increase since 1970 when only 8 million or 12 percent of all children lived with one parent. Black children were much more likely than White children to be living with one parent: 54 percent versus 19 percent, respectively, in 1988. These estimates represent the living arrangements of children at the time the data were collected. The number of children who lived with a single parent at any time during their childhood would be much higher.

Single parents are less well-educated.

The parent's educational level is an important aspect of the socioeconomic profile of children and their families. In 1988, the proportion of children living with a parent (i.e., householder or reference person) who had not completed high school was 32 percent among children in single-parent situations versus 17 percent of children in two-parent homes.

Single mothers are likely to face employment problems.

In 1988, about 84 percent of the children living with both parents had a parent who was employed full-time, compared with only 42 percent of those living with the mother alone. Problems securing adequate child care often complicate the single parent's ability to seek steady employment even if jobs are available to match their skills and experience.

Single mothers have low incomes.

About 13.5 million children were living with single mothers, and their average family income (including any child support payments) was $11,989, compared with $23,919 for those children living with their single fathers and $40,067 for children in households where both parents were present. These differences reflect both the greater earning power of single fathers and the fact that many two-parent family groups can rely on the incomes of two working parents.

The data in this brief are based primarily on estimates from the Current Population Survey for March 1988 and earlier years.

For information on this topic:

See-

Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 162, *Studies in Marriage and the Family*. (For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Stock number 803-005-10015-4. $2.50. For telephone orders, call (202) 783-3238.)

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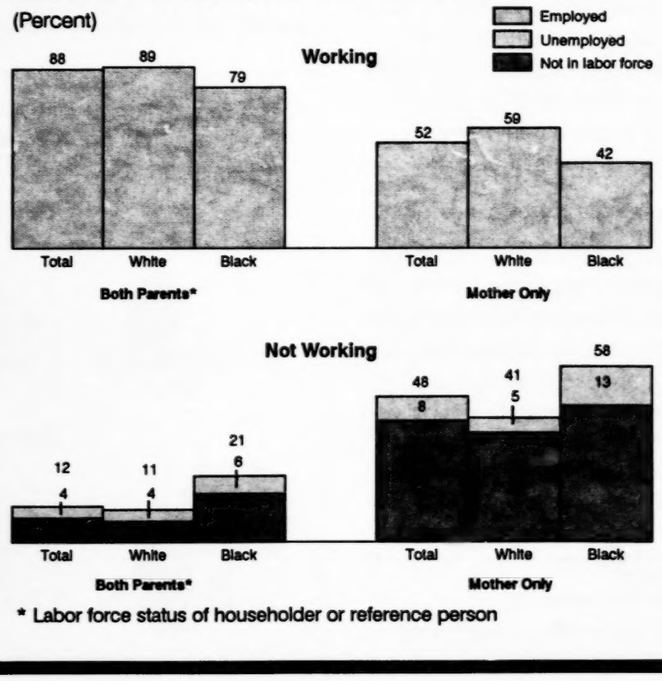
Among children living with their mothers only, almost half lived with mothers who did not work.



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